

THE ART OF MAKING A HEROINE.

Minnie Maddern Fiske Tells How She Took Tess Out of a Book and Put Her on the Stage.

TESS is no longer a novelty; it has become one of the historic triumphs of the stage. Everywhere is it discussed. Everywhere one hears comparisons drawn between Mrs. Fiske and Bernhardt, or Duse. Everywhere one stumbles against fierce discussions as to the morality of the play. Five years ago everybody was reading "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." At that time Hardy's novel was creating a stir second only to that occasioned by "Trilby."

Minnie Maddern Fiske, retired from the stage and living a quiet, domestic life, read it with everybody else and saw in the character of the heroine enormous dramatic possibilities.

"But at that time," said Mrs. Fiske to the writer one day last week, "I did not dream of playing the role myself. Indeed, I never contemplated returning to the stage. I drifted back through playing now and then for charity. But as to 'Tess.' In imagination I fitted the character to several actresses, any one of whom could, I think, have created the role."

"Were you long studying the part?" I asked.

"Now," said Mrs. Fiske, laughing mischievously, "I will confess something to you. I studied the role just two weeks. I received the manuscript from Mr. Stoddard exactly a fortnight before its first representation. At that time my husband was quite ill, and I was more absorbed in caring for him than in preparing the part."

"To what do you ascribe its great success?"

"Because," said Mrs. Fiske, earnestly, "it possesses the popular element. It is packed with human nature, and appeals to all sorts and conditions of people. The working girl is just as interested in the sorrows of Tess as is the fine lady; the clerk, as is the scholar."

"Tess is to me a noble, wronged, suffering woman. She voices the anguish of her sex. Why should I not love to play the character?"

"Is your Tess the Tess of Mr. Hardy?"

"I have never looked at the novel since I read it five years ago," replied Mrs. Fiske, "so I really cannot say. But as I recall the story, I should say that my interpretation is different in some details. I believe the Tess of the book was more of an animal than the Tess I seek to portray! Was not Mr. Hardy's Tess a large, voluptuous creature? My Tess is sensitive, but not sensual."

"How do you devise the business? For example, how in the world did you ever think of the business at the dressing table just after the murder of Alec?"

"O, I don't know," quickly responded the actress; "I simply tried to act as any woman would under those circumstances. First, there is the horror of the deed, then the thought of flight very naturally succeeds. Any woman who had

committed a murder would say: She must try to look as though nothing unusual had happened. She sees herself in the mirror, dishevelled

and haggard. She makes a feeble attempt to improve her appearance so that people may notice nothing amiss. Hence the business with the hairbrush. Her mind wanders even as she tries to smooth her hair. It seems to me to be perfectly natural."

"And the absolutely natural movement you make when shocked and surprised—the opening of the mouth and then covering it with the hand—how did you happen to use it? That is a motion seen daily in real life, but I have never seen it used upon the stage before, and I have heard many people remark the same thing."

"It just came to me," replied Mrs. Fiske simply; "I cannot tell how these things come. There is no lengthy, tedious process of evolving them."

"Do you devise all your stage business?"

"Absolutely yes. I really love stage managing better than acting. It is an actual delight to me. If you would like to see me at the work I love best, come to rehearsal to-morrow morning."

I accepted the invitation, and for three hours watched the most indefatigable little stage manager I have ever seen. Mrs. Fiske was conversant not only with the lines of Cyprienne in "Divorçons," the play she was rehearsing that morning, but with those of every other character in the play. She fully understood the details of every situation and deftly showed each actor the possibilities thereof. Tireless, painstaking and gentle withal, she dominated the stage. From showing a servant the correct way to proffer a salver to pointing out the most fetching fashion of lovemaking, the actress was thoroughly at home. And, although never flagging in industry for an instant, Mrs. Fiske never fidgeted. Her repose is one of her greatest charms.

Mrs. Fiske is not like Bernhardt; she is not like Duse; she is like herself. Her piquant and picturesque personality is unique. Were she a Frenchwoman or an Italian, the town would be in a furor over her. As she is only an American, it is simply bewildered.

EDITH SESSIONS TUPPER.



Tess, as Mrs. Fiske Sees Her.



Tess, as Thomas Hardy Saw Her.



Tess, as She Appears in a Well Known Scene in the Play.